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SUBJECT: BULGARIAN PM SUPPORTS IRAQ STRATEGY, PLANS TO
EXTEND TROOP DEPLOYMENT

REF: STATE 3592

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[¶1.](#) (C) SUMMARY. Prime Minister Stanishev told Ambassador Beyrle January 12 that Iraq is at a crucial crossroads and "no one wants to see the U.S. fail." He said his government would begin formal discussions next week aimed at extending for another year the mandate of the Bulgarian forces deployed in Iraq. Echoing FM Kalfin's statements in Washington last month, he said Bulgarian firms were ready -- and deserved -- to help re-equip the Iraqi army. Citing his meetings with Iraqi leaders in Baghdad in December, Stanishev expressed skepticism about the capacity of the current Iraqi government to cope with its increased responsibilities under the new U.S. strategy, but agreed that we must work with the government we have. END SUMMARY.

[¶2.](#) (C) Drawing on reftel guidance and the Secretary's January 11 testimony to the SFRC, Ambassador briefed PM Stanishev January 12 on the new direction of U.S. strategy in Iraq. Stanishev called his December 13 visit to Iraq, in which he visited Bulgarian troops at Camp Ashraf and met with, among others, PM Malaki and President Talibani "a clear signal of our commitment." He expressed support for the President's decision to focus on the security situation in Baghdad, saying that security was a prerequisite for the success of the political and economic aspects of the strategy articulated by the President on January 11.

[¶3.](#) (C) Stanishev seconded the U.S. decision to give more responsibility to the Iraqi security forces, but said the Coalition must strike a careful balance between giving the Iraqis more responsibility and handing over too much too fast. The Iraqi security forces "are not ready to take over altogether" for security in Baghdad, according to Stanishev. In fact, Stanishev's biggest concern seemed to be the weakness of Iraqi institutions. He worried that the Iraqi government was claiming to be able to take on more responsibility than it was capable of handling and that PM Maliki did not have complete control of his government.

[¶4.](#) (C) To address these weaknesses, the Iraqis must form coalitions of moderate political forces across ethnic lines, Stanishev said. He argued that moderate Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds must "buy in" to a greater degree if the Iraqi government is to be effective. "When this happens, it will be much easier to suppress the insurgents," Stanishev said. At the moment, Sunnis feel isolated. Along with building inter-ethnic coalitions at all levels, passage of the new oil law should reassure Sunnis in particular, and for that reason is extremely important.

[¶5.](#) (C) In closing, Stanishev noted that Bulgaria's role in

guarding the remnants of the anti-Iranian MeK terrorist organization at Camp Ashraf made it particularly sensitive to Iran's role in the region. "It is important to see how things develop regionally," he said, noting that any attempt by Iran to stir up trouble with the MeK would have a direct impact on Bulgarian troops. In a January 11 discussion with the DCM, Deputy Foreign Minister Chaushev went further, arguing against attempts to "isolate" Iran or Syria. We pushed back, noting that these countries were isolating themselves by refusing to play by international rules.

16. (C) COMMENT. Stanishev characteristically did not pull any punches, saying that "many mistakes were made" in Iraq including, most recently, the handling of Saddam Hussein's execution. Yet he expressed overall agreement with the direction of U.S. policy, albeit with some doubts about Iraq's ability to uphold its side of the bargain. Perhaps most importantly, Stanishev did not waver in his commitment to push for the extension of the Bulgarian troop deployment at Camp Ashraf. We understand Washington is preparing an exchange of diplomatic notes similar to that of last year, which will codify military command and support arrangements. We hope to be able to provide a draft to the Bulgarians the week of January 15.
BEYRLE